

Planning Application Response of Planning Policy

Application No:	APP/14/01119
Site Address:	14 Portsdown Hill Road, Havant
Development:	Change of use from Bed & Breakfast establishment to a single residential dwelling with associated works.
Case Officer:	Mr D Eaves
Comments by:	Gavin Stonham
Date of Comments:	20 November 2014

Updated comments following additional information provided by planning agent:

Further to my previous response dated 14th November 2014 to this consultation, the applicant's agent Henry Adams has provided two updated marketing reports (vendor reports) one published by themselves and one by Fleurets Leisure Property Specialists. Both reports are dated October 2014.

The updated report from Henry Adams indicates the dates of four separate advertisements placed in the Chichester Observer between May 2013 and October 2014. The report from Fleurets indicates print advertising in two editions of Fleurets On Market and Hotels Review, dated March 2014 and October 2014. In addition to this advertising, both reports show extensive advertising via a number of property portal websites, as well as email mailshots and SMS text notifications. These efforts prompted more than 30 viewings and 7 initial offers. Although the Council has not received copies of every advertisement, a detailed enquiry log has been received which shows reasons for every viewing being unsuccessful. The number of advertisements satisfies the minimum requirement in DM3 (iv) of four weeks' worth within a six month period.

The agent's Planning Statement states that marketing commenced in May 2013 and has been ongoing continuously since – a total of 17 months' worth of marketing activity. The evidence of this, in particular evidence of extensive website coverage, satisfies in my view that the marketing exercise has been active and exhaustive. I feel therefore that the change of use application satisfies the requirements of policy DM3. I also take note of the information in the viability report on the impact on the viability of the business of the ongoing need for financial investment into the B&B to allow its use to continue to function under Environmental Health, Health and Safety and Fire Regulations. Taking into account the entire package of evidence I have no further objection to the application on policy grounds.

Previous comments:

The Local Plan is now comprised of the Core Strategy (2011) and the recently adopted Allocations Plan (2014). It should be noted that Saved Policies are no longer relevant.

The application proposes the change of use of a building currently in use as a bed & breakfast (B&B) into a single dwelling.

The main policies that apply to the application in my view are Core Strategy policies CS5: Tourism, CS11: Protecting and Enhancing the Special Environment of Havant Borough; and DM3(2) Protection of Existing Employment and Tourism Sites. The site does not overlap with any allocations in the Allocations Plan and the site falls outside of the urban area as defined in Core Strategy policy CS17, so this policy does not apply.

The applicant claims in the Planning Statement supplied with the application (prepared by planning agent Henry Adams) that the B&B should not be classified as tourist accommodation under Core Strategy policy CS5: Tourism, as it is mostly used by contractors rather than holidaymakers. I would dispute this assertion as the organisation's website (www.hightowers.co.uk) advertises rooms on a per room per night basis with breakfast included, in addition to self catering accommodation and business flatlets. In my view the fact that it is obviously available for and used by tourists means that the B&B should be treated as tourist accommodation for the purpose of this policy.

Policy DM3 (2) is the main policy of relevance however, as this relates to viability of the existing tourism business. The applicant has already received pre-application advice and is therefore aware of the Council's requirements in regard to the marketing information that needs to be provided to address Core Strategy policy DM3.

The main piece of minimum evidence to demonstrate non-viability that appears to be missing from the application is evidence that the premises were appropriately and extensively marketed for a period of 12 months. The Planning Statement states that this has been the case yet the evidence in the vendor reports which supposedly points towards this does not indicate a full 12 months' worth of extensive marketing. Copies of advertisements from local press and trade journals have been included in these reports although these constitute only two editions of a local newspaper (The Chichester Observer) in May 2013 and February 2014. Evidence of marketing via the Internet between March and July 2014 is available in the supplied vendor reports but even taking these into account the advertisements cover less than the six month period required under policy DM3 criteria iv).

Some of the adverts appear to show the B&B being marketed as a residential property. A change of use from Use Class C1 to Use Class C3 requires planning permission so this could have put off potential purchasers who were interested in buying the property as a dwelling. This seems to be reflected in some of the reasons given for non-purchase shown in the log of enquiries included in the vendor report from Henry Adams, for instance some enquirers felt it to be too much work to change it to a family home.

Dated photographs of marketing boards have not been provided, however the applicant's agent Henry Adams states in the Planning Statement that none was placed as it was felt that it would have put off potential B&B guests and that advertising through other media was more effective. This criterion has therefore technically also not been met, however the reasons given for not doing so (to avoid discouraging passing trade) are understandable.

The applicant has supplied evidence of marketing by email – although this does not fulfil criteria iv) – and has provided basic details of financial returns and expenditure over the past five years as well as the total numbers of bookings for the same period.

Paragraph 2.19 of the viability report states that there has been *"a steady decline in the number of customers staying at High Towers over the last five years"*. ***Income levels have remained relatively constant during this period thanks to efforts made by the applicant to enhance their business***". Although the table at paragraph 2.18 does indicate a fall in the number of guests, this does not seem to me to be conclusive evidence of non-viability and there is no conclusive evidence elsewhere in this report to indicate that the business is non-viable.

Core Strategy policy CS11: Protecting and Enhancing the Special Environment and Heritage of Havant Borough seeks to protect the undeveloped gap between Havant and Waterlooville. This area should not be affected, as the application is for a change of use and the only alterations are to the interior of the existing property according to the Planning Statement (paragraph 6.6).

Based on the available evidence, I feel that granting the application could lead to loss of a viable tourism use which would justify refusal of the application. If however the applicant could provide further marketing information then this stance could be reconsidered – in particular I would suggest that the following additional information is needed:

- Marketing information covering a full year, including advertisements in local press and trade journals covering a six month period.
- Written confirmation and, if possible, further evidence from the planning agent that the premises were appropriately and extensively marketed for a period of 12 months.